



NEWS RELEASE

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**USDA AWARDS \$24.6 MILLION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS FOR
EDUCATION AND MEDICAL SERVICE
--Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation, Nebraska recipient**

Vancouver, Wash., Oct. 7, 2004— Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced the selection of Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) grants totaling more than \$24.6 million, providing greater educational opportunities and medical service to rural residents in 45 states and two U.S. territories.

“The Bush Administration is committed to supporting rural communities by investing in technology,” said Veneman who was in Washington state to meet with USDA Forest Service officials concerning Mount St. Helens volcanic activity. “These grants will help expand the availability of state of the art medical and educational resources to rural families.”

In total, 40 distance education grants for \$17.1 million, and 22 telemedicine grants for more than \$7.5 million were selected for funding. The education projects will help schools provide students with educational tools to better equip them for the global digital economy. Additionally, rural residents will have access to better, faster and more modern health care through medical service facilities. A complete list of the selected grant recipients can be found at the USDA Rural Development web site at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

“Information technology is critical to rural Americans. It significantly improves the quality of their health care and their ability to gain access to educational programs that better prepare them to compete in a global marketplace,” said Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development Gilbert Gonzalez.

“We are pleased that the Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation of Kearney, Neb. is the recipient of \$284,766 in telemedicine grant funds,” stated Jim Barr, state director for USDA Rural Development in Nebraska. “The awarded funds will assist the hospital in bringing continued quality medical services to rural Nebraska.”

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. USDA Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure.

Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/>. For further information on the DLT program in Nebraska contact Andre Boening at (402) 543-2129, andre.boening@usda.gov, 2351 Rd 43 Linwood, Neb. 68036.

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